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Watchdog for CIA?

The entire future of the Central Intelligence Agency hinges on decisions now being made at the highest level of government — the White House.

CIA, which had its origin in the World War II office of Strategic Services, is the nation's top intelligence evaluation and operations organization. It has operated under conditions of extraordinary secrecy for two decades, and this very secrecy has now become its Achilles' heel.

CIA's difficulties stem from the failure of the revolutionary invasion of Cuba. The agency has been widely charged with providing wrong intelligence estimates on a Cuban uprising to President Kennedy. But some of CIA's top executives claim privately that their errors were in no way as great as have been depicted to the public, nor was the CIA alone responsible for the erroneous information on which Kennedy acted.

As has been demonstrated many times before, a "secret" government agency is a sitting duck for attacks by ill-informed or politically partisan individuals. The present situation is no exception.

Rumors are circulating in Washington that CIA's head, Allen Dulles, will be retired shortly, and that the agency's intelligence and operations activities will be separated. It already has been confirmed that Kennedy has taken steps to strengthen the board which oversees its administration. Powerful forces in Congress are again clamoring for establishment of a congressional "watchdog" committee to keep track of CIA's doings.

CIA officials say privately that the agency's record, if it could be made public, would give the lie to implied charges of inefficiency and bad judgment. They have been telling this to select members of the Washington press corps and to senators and congressmen who will listen.

However, you can sense that they are fighting a losing battle. They expect some form of supervision from Capitol Hill, and their real effort now is to hold it to a minimum so that some of the country's most important intelligence projects do not become matters of gossip in congressional corridors.